

## **2004 Initiatives**



**Health  
Care**

**Achieving a  
Healthier  
Hawai‘i**

We are blessed to be one of the healthiest states in the nation. Yet there are still many children and adults who do not receive basic medical, dental and mental health care.



Providing quality health care for all residents is currently beyond our state's financial ability, but we must begin to make progress toward our goal. My administration's 2004 initiatives include:

- An additional \$2.7 million to provide primary care for uninsured residents treated at community health centers.

I visited five community clinics on four islands during the past year and found their boards and staffs fully committed to quality care for both the insured and uninsured in their neighborhoods. These clinics treat thousands of children and adults who otherwise would go without medical services, meaning fewer people end up in emergency rooms because they receive basic care on an ongoing basis.

- \$5 million in state funds, to be matched with federal funds, to provide medical assistance for an additional 6,000 children and 1,000 low-income adults through the state's Medicaid program. Part of these funds would also be used to start a new program to provide medical services for pregnant immigrants.
- \$18.5 million for mental health services across the state. After decades of neglecting the mental health needs of Hawai'i's families, we must be bold in dealing with this difficult and heart-wrenching problem. This funding would allow our community mental health centers and the Hawai'i State Hospital to help more people, and would increase the

likelihood that homeless people suffering from mental illness could live a life off the streets.

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## *Improving Health Insurance Options*

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Besides spending additional state funds, there are several other steps we propose to make private health insurance available to more residents. We are recommending, as we did in 2003, that the legislature eliminate the premium tax on new companies seeking to sell medical insurance to Hawai'i residents. This would increase competition by leveling the playing field and thus lowering health insurance costs.

We also propose passage of a law enabling members of business associations to join together in negotiating affordable group health insurance rates to cover their employees.

Everyone knows prescription drugs are a big part of the price of health care. To facilitate the availability of lower-cost generic drugs, we propose legislation improving procedures of the Drug Product Selection Boards.

We also recommend that the legislature amend the prescription drug program enacted last year – known as “Hawai‘i Rx” – to ensure it targets those residents who can least afford to purchase medications. In particular, this program should focus on families who earn no more than 350% of the federal poverty level and who are not eligible for Medicaid or an employer-provided health plan.

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### *Addressing Long-Term Care*

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The issue of long-term health care, especially as baby boomers enter their retirement years, is becoming an increasing challenge for our state. We seek to address this situation by:

- Supporting state tax credits for families and individuals who take responsibility for their own long-term care by purchasing insurance.
- Requesting over \$3 million in state and federal funds so the elderly and disabled can obtain more home- and community-based nursing care.

- Seeking \$860,000 for in-home chore services, allowing more people to remain longer in their own homes.

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## *Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles*

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The expression “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” reminds us that, often it is our own actions that have the biggest impact on our health. The simple, common-sense choices to avoid tobacco, excessive alcohol and harmful drugs, and to eat sensibly, exercise and get a sufficient amount of sleep will determine our quality of life to a large degree.

Each of us can lower our health care costs by making good lifestyle decisions. This is one area where each citizen can have a big impact on bringing down the cost of government.

